

SECTION 3

Fitness Gear and Where to Train



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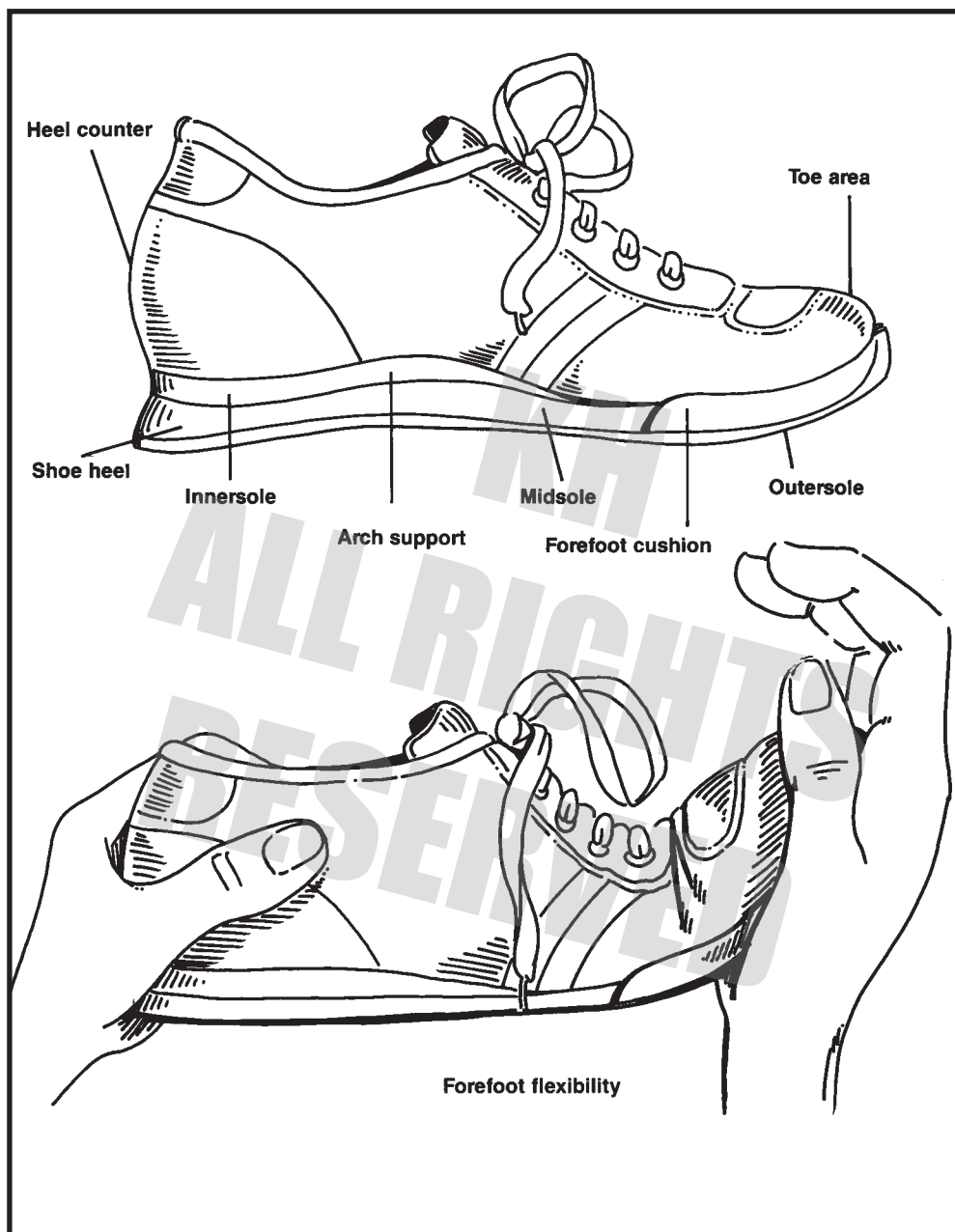
In Search of the Perfect Walking, Running, and Fitness Shoe

You want a shoe with flexibility, that supports your arches, cushions your heels, adds extra impact absorption at the balls of your feet, and fits well. Here's what to check out:

- **The outersole** should be flexible, yet durable.
- **The midsole** (between the outer and inner sole) should provide good stability and cushioning to absorb shock, yet allow for foot flexibility.
- **The innersole:** A high-shock-absorbent material is recommended. If the shoe you like doesn't have this, purchase an innersole separately.
- **The toe area:** This is the one place on the shoe where roominess counts. When you exercise, your foot swells. Allow for it. Can you wiggle your toes?
- **Forefoot cushion:** The greatest amount of force the foot must absorb is behind the ball of the foot. There must be good cushioning here.
- **Forefoot flexibility:** The shoe should bend (as the foot does) at the ball of the foot. Too stiff a forefoot will cause lower leg discomfort. This area needs to be flexible yet stable.
- **Arch support:** Make sure the arch provides comfortable support.
- **The heel counter:** This should be an inflexible material surrounding the heel area, holding it in place. The more it prevents excessive rolling and twisting, the better it is.
- **The shoe heel:** Look for an outer heel that makes a flush contact with the ground. If the inner heel height is too low, it will cause an excessive pull on the calf and Achilles tendon. The heel should provide good cushion without being too hard or too soft. Shoes are now designed in high-top ankle support. These help out a lot.
- **See the experts:** It's best to go to a specialty running or fitness store where a qualified salesperson can help you select a pair of shoes that offer your feet the support they need.
- **Measure your feet:** You may think you know your size, but it's best to get your feet measured each time you buy new shoes. Your feet change over time.
- **Comfort:** When you go shopping, take along the socks and any inserts that you've been using. That way you can make a realistic evaluation of how well the new shoe will fit your feet. Try on as many different models and pairs as possible. Do a test walk or run in the store, moving around for about 10 minutes. Don't purchase them if it feels uncomfortable. Also, because your feet swell during the day, it is best to purchase shoes in the afternoon or evening.



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How to Choose a Sports and Fitness Facility

Try to visit the prospective sports and fitness facility during the time you would be using the facility. Shop around using the following as a helpful checklist.

1. Is the location convenient to your home, work, or school?
2. Is it a workout gym, a social club, a coed facility, or a fitness center for families? What are you looking for?
3. Does the facility look clean, organized, seasonally air-controlled, and suitably lighted? Specifically check out the locker room and showers for cleanliness!
4. What facilities should you look for?
 - Well-equipped exercise rooms containing updated equipment. Are there enough weight-resistance machines, stationary bikes, treadmills, rowing machines, free weights, and space to accommodate the members?
 - An aerobic exercise room with a proper floor. Does it have a floating wood design or is it carpet, wood, or linoleum over cement (which is much more unsafe)? Does it have enough space for the class sizes? Is it air-conditioned?
 - Accessible racquetball or squash courts. What is the court reservation procedure? (If you have to reserve over 48 hours in advance, you know that they are getting heavy use.) Do the court floors and walls look very marked up? Do you have to pay for court time?
 - Well-maintained pool. Is it heated year-round? Is the size suitable to your needs?
 - Available track facilities. Is there an indoor or outdoor track?
 - Relaxing spa facilities. Is there a whirlpool, sauna, steam room, massage room, and cold plunge?
 - Well-kept locker room. Do you get a locker and key every time you use the facility? Or do you bring your own lock or rent out the locker? Does the club provide towels, soap, shampoo, hair dryers, and other grooming amenities?
5. What kind of staff does it have? Are there trained personnel in physical education, exercise physiology, nutrition, or sports medicine? Does the staff have a professional, friendly, and helpful attitude?
6. What type of programs do they run? Are there enough classes in a variety of workouts? Are there additional fees? Can you take a class any time you wish?
7. Do the club hours fit your needs?
8. **Examine the fees carefully!**
 - Are they affordable? Is there a payment plan?
 - Is there an initiation fee? Is it refundable? Is this a one-time charge or a yearly charge? Are there any monthly dues in addition? How much?
 - Be leery of contracts and “too good to be true” promotionals. Read all the small print before you sign.

- Be wary of “lifetime” memberships—is it your lifetime or the facility?
 - What are the cancellation policies? Must you sell your membership? Do you get a prorated refund?
 - Read with caution any “preopening” sales packages.
9. Does the club allow you to put your membership on hold for a short period (such as for a vacation) without having to pay the monthly dues?
 10. How much does it cost to bring a guest to the facility? Does the facility give out guest passes?
 11. How long has the sports and fitness facility been in operation?
 12. How long has the present management been with the fitness center?
 13. Ask if the fitness center belongs to any national trade organization with an established code of ethics for staff and clients.
 14. Before joining, talk to some members as they enter or on leaving the facility to get their opinions of the fitness center.



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Creating a Home Gym

You don't have to be rich to create a convenient home gym. Even if you belong to a workout club or fitness center, your schedule or occasional desire for workout privacy may warrant the purchase of home exercise equipment. Here are some tips to get you started.

1. Make sure you have enough space. A wall mirror helps you view your exercise technique and serves as a great motivator. Music helps too!
2. Make sure the lighting and air ventilation are adequate.
3. Before purchasing any equipment, identify your fitness needs. Do you want a jump rope, treadmill, stationary cycle, rowing machine, or step for cardiorespiratory fitness? Do you want equipment for specific exercises for your abdominals, legs, and buttocks? Having identified your fitness needs will prevent you from purchasing equipment of no practical use to you.
4. Look for equipment that features effective safety measures and provides progressive exercise guidelines.
5. Shop around. It's amazing how the cost of the same equipment varies from store to store! Examine the warranty and service agreements closely.
6. Watch out for attractive, shiny, lightweight equipment that lacks durability and stability.
7. Try the equipment out. Not all equipment feels the same. With mail-order equipment, review the return policies and procedures carefully before purchasing. Are the shipping charges reasonable?
8. Build your exercise area to fit your program. Buy a little equipment at a time and add as you see fit.
9. Stay away from products that guarantee phenomenal results in a short time.
10. When purchasing equipment on sale, see if the product is being discontinued. If it is, there may be a newer, better style available at the same price.
11. For display purposes, fitness store equipment is usually free standing and movable. Check to see which products need to be firmly secured to a wall or floor, and how they need to be secured.



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Finding the Right Instructor

All instructors have their own teaching style, and classes have their own special characteristics. Here's what to look for in an instructor and class to make sure it meets your needs.

1. Take a trial class or observe the instructor and class during the time you would normally attend.
2. Look for **quality** and not **quantity**. Just because a class does numerous repetitions or the instructor is “tough” doesn't mean it's a good class.
3. Does the instructor make an effort to teach, correct, explain, and give clear directions? Can you hear the verbal instructions? Does the instructor modify exercises for the students who have special needs?
4. If there is a mirror, does the instructor face it throughout most of the class? Mirrors are wonderful instructional aids, but direct eye contact is one of the most effective means of communication and interaction.
5. Look for a well-rounded workout: a thorough warm-up, a gradually increasing aerobic section, a winding down of the aerobics, a complete body-firming section, and a cool-down stretching segment.



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6. Does the workout seem to flow smoothly from one section to the next?
7. Is the class easy to follow? Could you see the instructor easily or was it too crowded?
8. Does the instructor inspire and motivate you? Did you enjoy the workout?
9. Was the workout challenging enough for you? Does the club or studio offer a variety of different levels and styles of classes?
10. Did you feel comfortable with the class atmosphere?
11. Could you hear the music? Was it too loud?
12. Does the class follow a prescribed exercise program? The American College of Sports Medicine recommends aerobic activity three to five times a week for between 20 and 60 minutes, at 55 percent to 90 percent of your maximum heart rate.
13. Is there any type of medical screening for participants prior to participation?
14. Is the cost of the class or program within your budget?
15. Is the class in a convenient location?
16. What training, credentials, and education does the instructor have? The credibility of an instructor who boasts of “being certified” cannot always be substantiated. Inquire about any specific training, experience, and education the instructor has had.
17. Many of the readers of this text may wish to pursue a fitness certification. The IDEA Health and Fitness Association (www.ideafit.com) has created an all-inclusive directory of fitness certifications and training groups. This robust directory of organizations not only shows basic information and the certification types that each group offers, but also highlights the organization’s upcoming classes and events, reviews, CECs/CEUs, exercise videos, testimonials and blog.